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Ministry of Education

PROVINCE SUPPORTS ABORIGINAL YOUTH CONFERENCE

PRINCE GEORGE – The Province is supporting a conference in Prince George where Aboriginal youth from around B.C. will gather to celebrate creative expression and discuss the pitfall of addictions, said Education Minister Shirley Bond.

"When we encourage Aboriginal students to express themselves, and include Aboriginal perspectives in our education system, students are more likely to stay in school and succeed," said Bond. "This government believes that Aboriginal students deserve every opportunity."

The three-day conference, organized by Carrier Sekani Family Services, is at the Prince George Civic Center April 3–5. The theme is "Be Free" and the conference will encourage the Aboriginal youth ages 14–25 to pursue their dreams free from drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

To help promote creative expression, the conference will include entertainment by Eagle and Hawk, who were nominated for a "Best Music of Aboriginal Canada" Juno Award in 2004. There will also be workshops and a poster contest involving youth who have developed anti-addiction messages. The Ministry of Education has provided $50,000 to support this conference.

"We appreciate the support of this government," said Mary Teegee, director of child and family services at Carrier Sekani Family Services. "Empowerment through education and a healthy holistic lifestyle is at the heart of our shared vision for our indigenous youth."

"While Aboriginal students are more likely to be successful now than in 2001, fewer than half still don't complete school," said Bond. "From the new historic agreement recognizing First Nations' jurisdiction over education on First Nations' land to the English 12 First Peoples course currently being developed, we're working with Aboriginal communities to improve B.C.'s education system to better serve Aboriginal students."

Increasing Aboriginal student school completion rates is one of government's top priorities. Since 2001, the completion rate for Aboriginal students has increased by five per cent to 47 per cent. However, the Aboriginal completion rate is still well below the provincial average of 79 per cent.

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Sponsoring this conference supports the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda to build new relationships with First Nations, and to close gaps in health, housing, education and economic opportunities. The Province announced last month that it will increase funding for Aboriginal students next school year. Funding for Aboriginal students will increase by $64 per pupil, from $950 to $1,014. Total Aboriginal funding will increase from $48.1 million this year to an estimated $51.1 million in 2007-08. The funding supports Aboriginal language and culture programs, Aboriginal support service programs, and other local Aboriginal education programs.

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